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NEWS

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STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE HERBERT H. BATEMAN
CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY READINESS

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I would like to welcome everyone here today to this joint Readiness, Personnel, and Installations and Facilities Subcommittees hearing. The reason for today's hearing is to take a final review of the current status of our military's readiness before Congress leaves town.

We recognize that there are many facets to readiness, and that current readiness problems cannot be dealt with in a vacuum. Readiness is not a snapshot. It is a moving picture, and the analysis must include longer term quality of life issues, and the nature and availability of equipment. This said, we must nonetheless focus upon and identify the real world problems that exist relating to the current readiness of our forces.

Since 1994 when this committee published its first report on Readiness, Members have continued to be mystified by the disparity between the reports on the status of military readiness received from the Pentagon, and the reports received from personnel when Members visited units in the field. It is only recently that we are beginning to read reports that the Administration and the Pentagon leadership agree that serious personnel and funding problems exist. We know these shortfalls are having serious negative impacts on military unit readiness, and we expect that through an open and candid dialogue with members of the military, such as our panel today, that we can fully understand the problems that exist.

The subcommittees represented here today are pleased to hear the Administration and the Pentagon leadership begin to make public statements about the problems they are having in maintaining readiness because we have known that the erosion of readiness, while gradual, has been constant for a number of years. The Pentagon's failure to confront this problem has hampered Congress' efforts to fix the problems it has identified through visits to units in the field and through testimony of operational commanders and the personnel they lead at hearings such as this.

We have a very distinguished panel here today to help inform us as to whether and how the Department of Defense proposes to address the continued decline in military readiness and quality of life for military personnel.

We are particularly pleased to have this group of military officers because they are currently commanding, or have recently commanded, units which are considered to be the "force providers" for their respective services. They can provide a unique perspective about the day to day challenges they must meet in their respective commands in order to provide the type and number of forces necessary to carry out our nation's military strategy.

We expect our panel members to address the implications for readiness in their commands of what we know to be a consistent marginal funding for military construction, base operations, and facilities' maintenance. We want to hear about the effects reported personnel shortages are having on the major commands within the services. We would like an assessment of the impact of anticipated funding levels for FY99.

We know budgets have continued to shrink, which has left the military with less flexibility in funding, and it will benefit all of us today if our panel members can give us an assessment of their command's ability to execute their current assigned missions.

We look forward to having an open and constructive dialogue with this panel of distinguished military commanders so that together we can begin to find solutions to the problems that exist.